



Public perceptions of climate change as a human health risk: Surveys of the United States, Canada and Malta

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Year: 2010
Journal: International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 7 (6): 2559-2606

Abstract:

We used data from nationally representative surveys conducted in the United States, Canada and Malta between 2008 and 2009 to answer three questions: Does the public believe that climate change poses human health risks, and if so, are they seen as current or future risks? Whose health does the public think will be harmed? In what specific ways does the public believe climate change will harm human health? When asked directly about the potential impacts of climate change on health and well-being, a majority of people in all three nations said that it poses significant risks; moreover, about one third of Americans, one half of Canadians, and two-thirds of Maltese said that people are already being harmed. About a third or more of people in the United States and Canada saw themselves (United States, 32%; Canada, 67%), their family (United States, 35%; Canada, 46%), and people in their community (United States, 39%; Canada, 76%) as being vulnerable to at least moderate harm from climate change. About one third of Maltese (31%) said they were most concerned about the risk to themselves and their families. Many Canadians said that the elderly (45%) and children (33%) are at heightened risk of harm, while Americans were more likely to see people in developing countries as being at risk than people in their own nation. When prompted, large numbers of Canadians and Maltese said that climate change can cause respiratory problems (78-91%), heat-related problems (75-84%), cancer (61-90%), and infectious diseases (49-62%). Canadians also named sunburn (79%) and injuries from extreme weather events (73%), and Maltese cited allergies (84%). However, climate change appears to lack salience as a health issue in all three countries: relatively few people answered open-ended questions in a manner that indicated clear top-of-mind associations between climate change and human health risks. We recommend mounting public health communication initiatives that increase the salience of the human health consequences associated with climate change.

Source: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2905567>

Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

audience to whom the resource is directed

Health Professional, Policymaker, Public, Researcher

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Temperature

Temperature: Fluctuations

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States, United States

Non-United States: Europe, Non-U.S. North America

European Region/Country: European Country

Other European Country : Malta

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

General Health Impact

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Timescale:

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified